

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)

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Spratt Floor Statement on the Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) made the following statement on the abuse of Iraqi prisoners during a House floor debate on a resolution deploring the abuse on May 6, 2004.

“Mr. Speaker, there is nothing we hold in trust more sacred than the good name of America, and the good name of our great country is at stake. We have been defiled, maligned, if not damaged irreparably in some parts of the world; and we cannot diminish the consequences.

”Just as the world has been fixated on those revolting photographs, the world is watching now to see what America will do, not what we will say, but how we will respond in fact. We should first of all rise up in indignation and outrage and condemn these atrocities and not diminish them. I do not care whether six soldiers or 600 were involved. We should make it unmistakably clear that this is conduct that Americans will not tolerate, we will not diminish, we will not excuse, and we will punish with severity.

“But our response cannot end with just indignation or even an abject apology. We must make every effort to find out what was involved in these atrocities, who was involved in these atrocities, directly involved, and involved in a supervisory capacity up the chain of command and down the chain of command, wherever it leads; and we must punish everybody who is culpable in a way that makes clear this is despicable conduct which we will not abide in the United States of America.

”That quest for facts must ask candidly, painfully whether or not these were isolated acts, these atrocities were isolated acts of poorly trained, undisciplined reservists, or whether they arise out of a culture that permitted and allowed interrogation techniques that call for hoods, sleep deprivation, and incessant questioning.

”These are hard questions. We have got to ask them. Was this military intelligence, military police, or was it both? Where did the system break down?

”In the committee room of the Committee on Armed Services, Mr. Speaker, we have cast in bronze a plaque with article 1 clause 8 of the Constitution, which gives Congress the power to raise and support an Army, a Navy, and provide for their regulation. This

was the way that the Parliament in the 17th century gained control of the government by gaining control of the military, among other things, by keeping on a short leash the law that permitted courts martial.

"The Department of Defense is and ought to be conducting its own investigation; but if we are worth our salt, if we are up to the powers the Constitution vests in us, we must conduct our own investigation.

"Woodrow Wilson once said that our greatest power is the power to investigate, to inform, to check the Commander-in-Chief, to notify, to make the American people understand what is happening in their government. So this is not a matter that we can delegate. This is not a matter that we can trust anyone else. This is a matter where we must not take the role of outsiders looking in. We should launch our own investigation. And one of the places where this resolution stops short, I would say to my good friend, the chairman of the committee, is that it does not emphatically call for our own independent investigation to lead wherever the facts may take us. We should do it because it is our duty. We should do it because of the trust we hold. We should do it for the sake of the soldiers, the vast majority of soldiers, who have served honorably, who have served and sacrificed and secured the interests of our country.

"But here, as in many places, this resolution pulls its punch. I support it. I will vote for it, but I think it should be more emphatic, more outraged, and I think it should be more of a beginning to our effort than an end, to the constitutional trust that we all hold, to find the facts, to ask why we are so late ourselves in being informed, and to see that the truth and the whole truth comes out."

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